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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9455
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1034
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1112
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA J2 SEOUL KOR
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA J5 SEOUL KOR
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA SCJS SEOUL KOR
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 002605

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/18/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KS](#)

SUBJECT: BIPARTISAN FRUSTRATION WITH PRESIDENT ROH MOUNTS

REF: SEOUL 2576

Classified By: CDA Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a round of calls on reform minded Uri and GNP National Assembly members, poloff met with Foreign Affairs Committee members Choi Jae-chun, Lee Mi-kyoung, and GNP member Park Jin on August 1. While they expressed some expected differences of views on ROK's North Korea policy, their frustration with the Blue House and Roh's support of Unification Minister Lee Jong-seok and DPM Kim Byoung-joon, who unwillingly announced his resignation on August 2, was pretty much the same. Given this lack of support in the National Assembly, the Roh Administration can look forward to a very difficult - if not impossible - legislative session. In terms of domestic politics Roh is already a lame duck. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) GNP Lawmaker and Foreign Affairs and Unification committee member Park Jin told poloff that tolerance for the Blue House had worn out and the focus now was on leading the government to a better, GNP led future. He said the GNP would chart a better DPRK policy based on reciprocity and that the ROK should not resume aid to the North despite the damage from recent heavy rains. However, several other GNP officials said that aid should restart if the South Korean people support a move, reflecting ongoing debate about humanitarian issues in North Korea.

¶3. (C) Uri Party member Choi Jae-cheon, who harshly reprimanded Unification Minister Lee Jong-seok for his "U.S. failed the most" comments in the July 25 Assembly hearings, said his Party was frustrated with the Blue House, but that there was no leader who could influence President Roh to step back from his incendiary policy and personnel decisions. He explained the stubbornness Roh continues to display makes it impossible for voices of reason from within the party to be heard. He noted that the President still wields too much power and that there should be systematic hearings and background checks of future ministerial appointments. Choi said the upcoming Foreign and Defense posts were likely to be filled with qualified candidates since there were no possible candidates among Roh's cohorts.

¶4. (C) Choi expressed certainty that the Uri Party would split at the start of 2007 and form a new party with former PM Goh Kun and the Democratic Party (DP). While many have insinuated this could happen over the past weeks, Choi's assertion was the first poloff has heard from an Uri Assembly

member. Choi said Chong Dong-yong and Kim Geun-tae's officials were already out in the countryside trying to drum up grass roots support for a new, progressive party. He also added that in informal straw polls conducted by these officials, support for Roh amongst even his hardest core of supporters had evaporated. He said that informal polls show only 20 percent of the informal group of Roh supporters was still standing by the President.

15. (C) Uri Party member Lee Mi-kyoung told poloff that she had, "stopped trying to understand the Blue House," and had stopped hoping the Blue House would act reasonably. She agreed that PM Han Myoung-suk was a voice of reason and hoped she would be able to successfully diffuse the DPM Kim situation. She noted that while Han's stock was rising, she owed too much to the Blue House to make a strong stand against the President regarding DPM Kim or other issues.

COMMENT

16. (C) The frankness with which Uri Party members expressed their disappointment with Roh was a change from the past. While obvious policy differences exist between the GNP and Uri parties on key issues such as North Korea and private school reform, when it comes to the Blue House and the cabinet, the parties are now quite close to each other. As the National Assembly convenes for a new session in about a month, the Roh Administration should expect difficult deliberation on virtually all of its legislative agenda. With the forced resignation of DPM Kim, future cabinet choices will be contentious. In terms of domestic politics, President Roh is a lame duck seventeen months before the end of his term. END COMMENT
YUN